

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13

/068 W

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R 301433Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9934

INFO AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 8048

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IV

SUBJ: RUMORED ILLNESS OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT

PHILIPPE YACE

REF OM ABIDJAN5'D )#53

1. PHILIPPE YACE, DESIGNATED HEIR TO PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY, HAS NOT APPEARED IN PUBLIC OR IN IVORY COAST NEWS MEDIA SINCE JUNE OF THIS YEAR. EMBASSY HAS HEARD FROM SEVERAL SOURCES, INCLUDING ONE WHO RECEIVED INFORMATION FGZM FRENCH EMBASSY, THAT YACE HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY ILL, HAS UNDERGONE SURGERY FOR STOMACH PROBLEMS IN EUROPE AND IS NOW RECUPERATING IN FRANCE OR SWITZERLAND. HE HAS HISTORY OF STOMACH PROBLEMS, BELIEVED TO BE ULCERS. YACE'S DEMISE OR PROLONGED INCAPACITY COULD REOPEN DIFFICULT PROBLEM OF PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION WHICH WAS THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN RESOLVED LAST YEAR.

2. YACE IS PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND SECRETARY GENERAL OF PDCI, IVORY COAST'S ONLY POLITICAL PARTY. HE IS NOT A POPULAR FIGURE, HOWEVER. HE COMES FROM A SMALL COASTAL TRIBE AND MADE  
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MANY ENEMIES AS PROSECUTOR DURING THE TRIALS FOLLOWING ALLEGED

COUP ATTEMPTS IN THE EARLY 1960'S. MUCH OR MOST OF HIS AUTHORITY DERIVES FROM CLOSE AND LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIP TO PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET. YACE'S SUCCESSION WAS ESTABLISHED BY CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT IN MAY 1975 NAMING PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO FILL PRESIDENCY AFTER THE DEMISE OF THE INCUMBENT.

3. ANOTHER AMENDMENT PASSED OCTOBER 1975 PREVENTS GOVERNMENT MINISTERS FROM SERVING IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. IVORIAN PARLIAMENT IS MORE THAN A RUBBER STAMP -- IT HAS DEFEATED AT LEAST ONE GOVERNMENT BILL AND PERFORMS AN IMPORTANT LIAISON FUNCTION WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES -- BUT IT IS NOT VERY MUCH MORE. ONLY ASSEMBLY MEMBER OF REAL NATIONAL PROMINENCE IS YACE HIMSELF. SHOULD HE NOT BE ABLE TO SUCCEED HOUPHOUET, IVORY COAST MIGHT BE IN SOMETHING OF A CONSTITUTIONAL PICKLE. ASSEMBLY WOULD PRESUMABLY HAVE TO ELECT NEW PRESIDENT FROM AMONG ITS MEMBERS, NONE OF WHOM HAS STATURE OR POLITICAL BACKING ADEQUATE TO BE CONSIDERED AS PRESIDENT OF REPUBLIC.

4. SUCCESSION MIGHT PROVE DIFFICULT EVEN FOR YACE. "RADIO TREICHVILLE", ABIDJAN RUMOR MILL, SUGGESTS THAT MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH JEAN BAPTISTE MOCKEY, LONG-TIME ANTAGONIST AND EVEN ENEMY OF YACE, IS INCREASING HIS INFLUENCE WITH PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET AND WITHIN GOVERNMENT AND ENJOYING GROWING POLITICAL SUPPORT. THERE ARE OTHER POSSIBLE CANDIDATES WHO MIGHT TRY TO BLOCK YACE'S SUCCESSION DESPITE HIS CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO IT.

5. HOUPHOUET IS IN MOURNING FOR HIS SISTER-IN-LAW WHO WAS DROWNED IN EARLY AUGUST AND POSSIBLY DEPRESSED BY THE DEATH OF SEVERAL OLDFRIENDS IN RECENT MONTHS, BUT EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS HIS HEALTH CONTINUES TO BE EXCELLENT. HE IS SEVENTY YEARS OLD, HOWEVER, AND THE ISSUE OF SUCCESSION IS ALWAYS OF INTEREST HERE. YACE'S PROLONGED ABSENCE CANNOT BUT REVIVE DISCUSSION OF THIS PROBLEM.

COOKE

NOTE BY OC/T: MESSAGE AS RECEIVED.

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